

The Wisconsin Association of Fairs awarded several awards at the 2026 WAF Annual Convention at the Chula Vista Resort in Wisconsin Dells, January 11-15.

Outstanding Fair Person Award: Awarded to a fair board/county fair committee member being active 12 years or less

Kara McManus
Central Wisconsin State Fair
OFP District 1

Kara's passion for the Central Wisconsin State Fair began at a young age, exhibiting many animals in the livestock area. For the past eight years, Kara has served on the fair board, including the position of Vice President. During this time, she has attended conventions and Zone 4 meetings.

This year, Kara introduced an exciting idea called "Can-Do Fair Day." This was held on the opening day of the fair and offered free admission to fairgoers who brought in two non-perishable food items. Thanks to Kara's leadership and the generosity of our community, over 2,000 food items were collected and distributed to local food pantries throughout Wood County. Kara is already brainstorming ways to build on this success and make it even better for future years.

Throughout the fair and non-fair events, Kara can be found lending a hand wherever it's needed and is always ready to step up and support. Her involvement with the Central Wisconsin State Fair goes well beyond fair week. She plays an active role in board meetings throughout the year and is always on the lookout for new ideas. Her dedication and creative thinking have made a meaningful impact.

Congratulations Kara on your Outstanding Fair Person Award!

Heather Ripplinger
Washburn County Fair
OFP District 2

Heather Ripplinger has served the Washburn County Fair for 12 years and puts her energy into fair committee work and 4-H. The woodworking building needed a face lift and a superintendent, and the Ripplinger Family championed the challenge bringing in painting equipment and manpower to do the job. Heather brought the Woodworking building to life with her hours of planning and displaying of all the items within. She even created contests to entice youth and open class exhibitors.



Heather and family constructed a life size tree house assembled on a tree to be used as part of our theme decorations. She and her husband Dan initiated both the "Classic Car Show" and the "Drive Your Tractor to the Fair," day. Both events have grown and now have sponsors of their own.

Heather drew up plans to reshape our fair landscape, allowing for better utilization of space especially in our vender area. Seeing a need, she created an infant care station and made it comfortable by bringing furniture from home. She even placed a corn pit nearby for young families to enjoy. Her heart felt thinking and helping hands have earned her the Outstanding Fair Person Award.

Congratulations Heather!

Russ Cross
Lodi Fair
OFP District 3



When Russ Cross joined the Lodi Fair Board, he brought his skills of large building construction and knowledge of livestock needs. He also saw potential for the new barns to pay for themselves by renting them out for boat storage in the off-season.

Russ has an eye for visual improvements and focuses on easy upkeep, while on a tight Fair budget. He spends hours planning, recruiting help and completing jobs often in his spare time and with his own equipment. Russ cares about neatness and safety of the barns, the exhibitors, their animals and our visitors.

When we needed a nice backdrop for photos, Russ and his crew brought in *not* 1 but 2 old barn walls, one for inside and one for outside pictures.

New hog pens and a showring were needed, Russ, again, was there calculating for the extra space for more exhibitors and hogs. His big score was finding a used stainless-steel, portable show ring, so we never have to paint it again!

After the show and Meat Sale are completed, Russ has a crew of fair kids clean the area to make room for the Barn Dance with a live band. It has become a highlight for the exhibitors, parents and even the hogs appreciate good Blue Grass or Country tunes to relax to.

Congratulations Russ on your Outstanding Fair Person Award!

Jon Tanis
Walworth County Fair
OFP District 4

Jon Tanis is a valued member of the Walworth County Fair Board. He is the first to step in when something needs fixing and the last to leave when work must be done. He brings both energy and laughter to any project.



Jon has contributed to projects, and behind-the-scenes efforts that improve the fair experience for thousands of guests each year. In 2022 he Built and donated a She Shed that was raffled off with all proceeds benefiting Barnyard Adventure, an educational program for families and youth.

He donated an extraordinary \$5,000.00 prize to inspire participation and creativity among young exhibitors in the 2023 Bird House Build-Off. In 2024 he was instrumental in bringing sensory-friendly carnival hours, making the fair more inclusive and welcoming.

Jon donates countless hours maintaining the fairgrounds and serving in the FFA Food Booth. When heavy rains shut down Ribfest, Jon was there hauling in tons of fill so the grounds could safely reopen.

He is not afraid to be the highest bidder at the Pies in the Park Auction just to feed his LOVE of pie. He motivates and inspires youth to take part in agriculture and creative projects.

If you are looking for Jon, good luck because he is everywhere doing everything but tonight, he is here receiving the Outstanding Fair Person Award. Congratulations Jon!